

Sánchez speaks out in Small Business Committee Condemning Unethical Contracting and Poverty Wages that will Impede Revitalization of the Gulf Coast Region

WASHINGTON- Alarmed at the situation that has ensued in the Gulf Coast since President Bush's waiver of the Davis-Bacon Act on September 8th, Congresswoman Linda Sánchez (CA-39) spoke out today at the Small Business Committee's hearing on "Small Businesses and Katrina: Rebuilding the Economy." In her remarks she encouraged Members of Congress to take a closer look at the situation and is urging President Bush to revisit his decision to suspend the Davis-Bacon Act.

"As if the people of the Gulf Coast haven't suffered enough, the Bush Administration has implemented policies that are allowing contractors to pay sub-par wages and import workers from other parts of the country to rebuild the region. This is morally reprehensible. We need to ensure Louisianans rebuild Louisiana, Mississippians rebuild Mississippi, but that is NOT what's happening and we can thank President Bush for that," said Congresswoman Linda Sánchez.

Members of International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 130 based in Metairie, Louisiana are the latest victims of President Bush's waiver of the Davis-Bacon Act and his allowing out-of-state businesses to profit from the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast region. Electrical union members have said publicly that 75 electricians from New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Lake Charles, LA were hired by a minority contractor a few weeks ago for a \$163 million, 21-month project at the Naval Air Station in Belle Chasse to wire a "tent city" that would house 15,000 military personnel. However, four weeks into the project, BE&K, the overall project contractor from Birmingham, AL, told the 75 workers that their services were no longer needed. Workers later found out that they were released so that BE&K could replace them with out-of-state workers that would be paid HALF of what the workers were paid previously (they were being paid the prevailing wage for an electrician of \$28 per hour, including benefits, while the out-of-state workers are paid only \$14 per hour).

"This is outrageous. Out of one side of his mouth, President Bush is talking about the importance of helping Gulf Coast families rebuild their communities and their lives. Out of the other side of his mouth, President Bush is allowing businesses to get away with robbing jobs from local workers. He's allowing hurricane victims to be victimized a second time. Unfortunately, BE&K's replacement of local workers in Belle Chasse probably isn't an isolated incident," added Congresswoman Sánchez.

"Local people are being treated like second class citizens in their own communities. These workers have lost everything, they are living in their cars and only have the clothes on their backs and now they don't even have their jobs," said IBEW member Roger Hammond.